



FREEDOM

April 16, 2004

Watch

Soldiers get some air time with *'Mail Call'*
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CJTF-180 maintains continuity during transfer
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Aloha!

The 17th Public Affairs Detachment, from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, has assumed responsibility of the *Freedom Watch* from the Soldiers of the 4th PAD. We have also moved offices to Bldg. 425, Room 107, next to the PARWAN PRT offices.

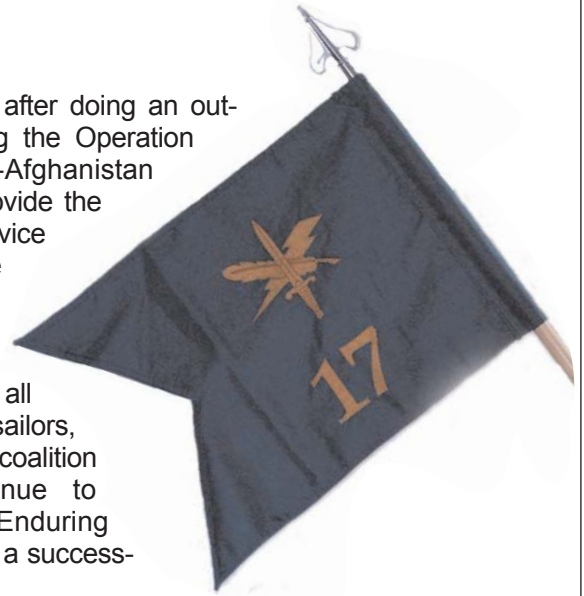
If you have a story idea, would like to submit stories and photos for publication in the *Freedom Watch* or would like to offer feedback, please contact the editor at 231-3338 or by email at carls@baf.cjtf180.army.mil.

Please keep in mind that all stories are subject to editing for length, as well as content, and photos must be of high image quality to be considered for publication.

As our predecessors make their way home

to Fort Hood, Texas, after doing an outstanding job of telling the Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan story, we strive to provide the same outstanding service they have given the Task Force for the past nine months.

We look forward to telling the story of all the great Soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and coalition partners who continue to make Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan a successful endeavor.



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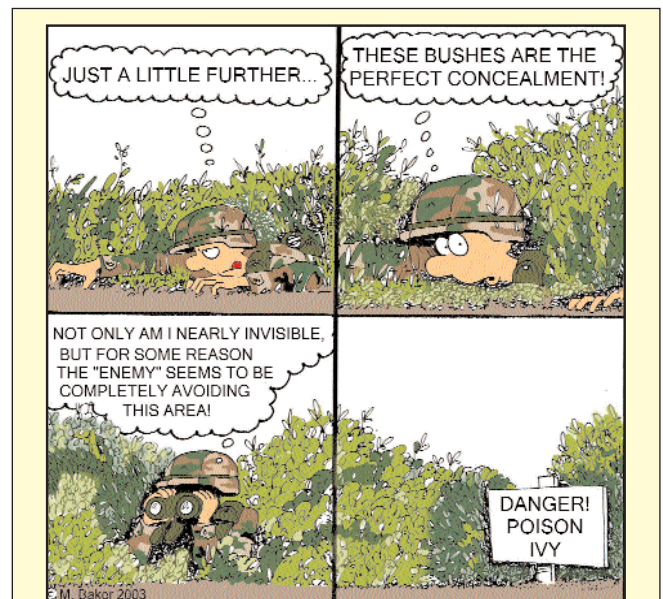
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Cover photo by Pfc. Cheryl A. Ransford, 17th Public Affairs Detachment
R. Lee Eremy (left) interviews a Soldier with the 805th MP Co. during local production of the History Channel show "Mail Call."



Pvt. Murphy's Law

By Mark Baker

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Commander – Maj. Steven J. Wollman
NCOIC – Staff Sgt. Monica R. Garreau
Editor – Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl
Journalists – Sgt. Frank Magni,
Pfc. Cheryl A. Ransford, Pfc. Chris Stump

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CJTF-180 maintains continuity through transfer

Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan – The transition between the 10th Mountain Division and the 25th Infantry Division (Light) for responsibility of the Combined Joint Task Force 180 has involved more than crowded dining facilities and gyms.

Within the Joint Operations Center, members from each staff hand over lessons learned and standard operating procedures with the goal of the Tropic Lightning Division taking the reins of the operation within a few weeks.

Capt. Dean Cuzick, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, CJTF 180 said with the transition so far running smoothly, nothing has happened by luck.

“Whenever the Army undergoes an operation like this, two aspects remain very important – communications and planning,” said Cuzick. “Many agencies on Bagram Air Base have been planning for this transition for at least six months. Also each unit has been communicating with each other for some time now.”

“The building has been very intensive

preparing for not only the arrival the 25th ID (L) but 2,200 Marines,” said Cuzick. “I’ve seen so much go up in preparation for this transition, Bagram Airfield just doesn’t look the same as when I first got here.”

Although the transfer of authority will involve the 25th ID (L) and 10th Mtn. Div., CJTF-180 is composed of many other agencies from the Air Force, Navy and Marines, as well as other coalition partners.

In terms of working seamlessly with these other agencies, Lt. Col. Eric Turner, 25th ID (L) deputy chief of operations, said the 25th has had no problem.

“In today’s Army, and in the 25th, we work so often with other services and



Photo by Pfc. Chris Stump

Soldiers from the 25th ID(L) exit a plane along the way to Afghanistan this month. The division has authority of CJTF-180 for the next year.

international armies through annual training exercises, when we fall into a mission like this our Soldiers already have the background to be successful,” he said.

Turner said these additional assets also create continuity for CJTF-180 during the turn over.

“Whatever assets the 10th leaves with

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NATO allies celebrate accession with flag raising ceremony

Lt. Col. Florentin Pera
CJTF-180 Romanian Army Liaison

A flag-raising ceremony and a special meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers were held at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium April 2 to celebrate the accession of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The flags of the seven new Allies were raised at the entrance to the Alliance’s headquarters as each country’s national anthem was played.

The Foreign Ministers of the current 19 members and the seven new Allies, as well as NATO staff witnessed the historic and emotional moment.

“The accession of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia demonstrates the principle that freedom is irrepressible. From now on, 26 allies will be joined in a commitment to defend each others’ security and territorial integrity. This is the strongest, most solemn commitment nations can undertake,” said Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, opening a special meeting



Maj. Victor Negrea

Lt. Col. Florentin Pera, Romanian Army Liaison for CJTF-180, talks to attendees at a luncheon on Bagram Air Base celebrating the accession of several new members of NATO April 2.

of NATO Foreign Ministers, which followed the raising of the flags.

To celebrate this special event, Romanian officers from CJTF-180 held a special meeting at Bagram Air Base with Maj. Gen. Lloyd Austin III, commander of CJTF-180, members of his staff and coalition staff officers from Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Republic of

Korea, Pakistan, Poland and Slovakia.

Lt. Col. Florentin Pera, the Romanian Army liaison officer, briefly addressed the attendees.

“Currently, the Romanian Armed Forces are involved in five ongoing operations, along with NATO members, in four different military theatres – Afghanistan (ISAF and Enduring Freedom), in Iraq (Iraqi Freedom) and in the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina – SFOR and Kosovo – KFOR). We Romanian officers are honored to be involved, together with Coalition officers, in the activities of CJTF-180 and to bring our contribution to the war against terrorism,” said Pera.

Romanian troops and officers from Kandahar Air Base, the Afghanistan Nation Training Detachment, the International Security Assistance Forces Romanian Military Detachment, the Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan and the CJTF-180 have carried out and will continue to carry out their missions with maximum responsibility, said Pera.

“We believe that together, like a professional team, we can accomplish our goals.”

Agreement gives ANA heavy weapons

Staff Sgt. Kelly McCargo
93rd Signal Brigade

KABUL, Afghanistan - Surrounded by billowing clouds of dust and diesel exhaust fumes, the first heavy equipment trailer hauled off some heavy weapons to the various Afghan weapon cantonment sites after a brief press conference at Durulaman Palace March 27.

"This is a very happy day indeed," said Mohammad Akber.

Akber, an Afghan citizen, rode his bicycle to the press conference in front of the palace.

"They have collected all of the heavy weapons from the divisions of soldiers and given them to the Afghan National Army," he said. "As these warlords lose power, the Afghan people will become more confident of the future ahead."

As part of an agreement between the Afghan Government and International Security Assistance Force, local militia forces would turn heavy weapons over to the Afghan Government's cantonment, or storage, sites.

To mark the occasion, the Afghan Ministry of Defense held its press conference at the site of some of the fiercest fighting in Afghanistan during this decade.

"These heavy weapons are relics and a memory of the bravery of the Afghan mujahideen. They will now be submitted to the ANA," said Rahim Warduk, Afghan Deputy Minister of Defense. "Any Afghan who is in favor of peace and security in

Afghanistan will appreciate the submission of these heavy weapons and help the process."

More than 200 various artillery pieces will be sent to a cantonment site at Reshkalore, and 100 T-55 Russian Main Battle Tanks will go to a site at Badhedaud. The removal of

"As these warlords lose power, the Afghan people will become more confident in the future ahead."

Mohammad Akber
Afghan citizen

these weapons from the local militia forces offers Afghans a "three-pronged" approach toward future success.

"It removes a threat from the city, it brings Afghan militia forces closer to the central government and it strengthens the ANA," said British Maj. Jonathon Blair-Tidewell, ISAF plans and logistics officer.

Such a large shipment of weapons accounts for 40 percent of the heavy weapons in Kabul, and ISAF plans to have the remainder out by the end of the year, according to Tidewell.

Many of the weapons were turned in by the local militia, Tidewell said.

"ISAF welcomes the acceleration of the disarmament process here in Kabul and

throughout Afghanistan," said German Maj. Gen. Wolfgang Korte, Deputy ISAF Commander. "The heavy weapons that were used in the wholesale destruction of Afghanistan are coming under direct control of the legitimate, central government of the country."

Military attaches from several countries attended the event.

"The world is watching. The Berlin conference is approaching quickly and today's event, marking the beginning of the completion of heavy weapons cantonment in Kabul will serve to build confidence in donor nations," said Korte. "They can see that their commitment is bearing fruit, and they will be encouraged to stay the course in supporting the Afghan people."

During a separate interview, Air Force Maj. Gen. Craig Weston, Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation in Afghanistan, applauded the weapons turn in.

"The voluntary turn-in of heavy weapons and decisions about accelerating the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process represents the Afghan people well and should send a strong message that this country stands beside the rest of the world," he said.

The equipment trucks with its trailers roared off taking the very tanks that once rocked the community.

Akber stood motionless holding his bicycle with a smile on his face, because the very weapons that devastated his society would now be used to protect it as it is being rebuilt.

Enduring Voices

What has deploying to Afghanistan made you more cognizant of?



1st Lt. Eric Swiger
1st Bn., 501st Para. Inf. Rgt.
"I am more aware of the impact we have on the country."



Cmdr. Herb Burns
U.S. Navy
"I am more aware of force protection and the plight of the locals."



Capt. Bill Gabbert
1163rd ASMB
"I am more aware of the price of freedom and the sacrifices people make."



Pvt. Joseph Manthe
LTF 725 MSB
"I watch where I walk and always look around."

ANA to establish temporary Kandahar post

Spc. Douglas DeMaio
Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – The Afghan National Army is preparing to establish a permanent security presence in southern Afghanistan. This planned expansion of the growing National Army is timely as it induces security in the region prior to the presidential election scheduled for June.

U.S. military officials and members of the Afghan central government traveled here March 15-18 to determine where to best establish a temporary army post for the ANA, until a permanent post is built.

“June is only three months away,” said Navy engineer Cmdr. Dean Amsden, Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan, an organization designed to aid the government of Afghanistan with developing its military defense sector.

Tent camps can go up in a matter of days, but other construction requires months, he said. The temporary base will bridge the time it takes to construct the durable, permanent facilities that will

house the regional command and the 1st brigade.

“A temporary base will allow us to put a larger amount of troops in Kandahar in a shorter time span,” said Lt. Col. Dave Prugh, training and fielding officer for the ANA Plans and Design Team, OMC-A.

The temporary base is just a part of the whole picture to bring security to all of Afghanistan.

“The ANA will be effective,” said Prugh. “I believe the elections will continue to demonstrate that point. The ANA has already proven their worth during the Constitution Loya Jirga. They’ll do it again in the regions ... starting with Kandahar.”

Moving ANA troops into the Kandahar region is important because it informs the community that the central government is there to stay,” said Prugh.

“It makes sense to me in an environment such as this that Soldiers loyal to the central government will create an environment favorable to that central government,” said Amsden.

The ANA will provide the region with

a sense of security that factional fighting will be eliminated. The intent is that the ANA will secure the region they inhabit and influence the whole country.

“As the other forms of authority are supplanted by the ANA, the community will accept that authority which is derived from the formal government of Afghanistan,” he said. “The entire region will benefit from fielding a fit unit that can provide the security for the elections and the populous in general.”

Yet the general populous will not be the only ones benefiting from the ANA’s move to Kandahar.

Until the permanent post is built, the temporary facilities will provide ANA soldiers deployed to the area a relatively comfortable place to live, while they provide security required to ensure successful elections, he said. The soldiers will not be subjected to the unhealthy environment of base camps in the dust or jammed in bombed out structures with no sanitary facilities. In this improved environment, they will be able to operate at full capacity for the entire time they are deployed to Kandahar.

Transfer, continued from Page 3

will be made up for through our partners,” he said.

Outside the JOC, new Soldiers to Bagram Air Base also deal with the transition of a new place to live. Accommodating the Soldiers as they wander around looking for the common features,

veterans to Bagram also try to lend a helping hand to their counterparts.

“When our replacements first got here we helped them get the lay of the land,” said Cpl. James Troxel, 66th Engineer Detachment. “I gave them the tour and tried to pass on knowledge that would help make their stay more comfortable.”

In return for their generosity the 29th Engineer Detachment from Schofield Barracks freed up time to let their counterparts out process and prepare for their return trip home.

Staff officers from both divisions noted that even though there were differences in the way that each unit conducts business, the transition went smoothly.

Maj. Rod Hammond, CJTF 180, chief of current operations (night shift) said the hardest part of the transition was to train replacements while conducting combat operations and daily JOC operations.

“You have to train and do your job because the combat units are still conducting operations. We don’t have the luxury of ignoring them because our replacements are here,” said Hammond, adding that he couldn’t have expected a better hand over.

Cuzick attributes some of the success to the larger amount of Soldiers the 25th ID (L) headquarters element deployed with.

“We didn’t even initially deploy with this many Soldiers and through attrition to the creation of the Combined Forces Command we were a bit short-handed. I see that they will definitely have the people they will need.”

With the 25th ID (L) ready to take over, Turner said he attributes much of the success to the 10th Mtn. Div.

“So far there have been no hiccups,” Turner said. “But the 10th has done everything possible to ensure our success.”



Photo by Pfc. Cheryl A. Ransford

Sgt. 1st Class Cleveland Guess and Sgt. 1st Class Kelvin Barton (pointing) both from JLC-180 show Sgt. Brian Deleon (left) from 125th Sig. Bn., the different locations around Bagram Air Base.

'Mail Call' in Afghanistan

Host R. Lee Ermey, military celebrity, on patrol with members of Operation Enduring Freedom

Story and photos by
Pfc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

When Digital Ranch Productions got wind of "Mail Call," a weekly History Channel show that is dedicated to telling the military story from the service members' perspective, they knew exactly who they would have host it – Gunnery Sgt. (Ret.) R. Lee Ermey.

After two and a half years of production, "Mail Call" came to Afghanistan to spend time with the service members who have been deployed here in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

During Ermey's visit, he reached as many service members as possible. He began on a routine patrol with the 805th Military Police Company, which is comprised of several Army Reserve units from across the United States.

During the patrol he was able to throw a live grenade and fired weapons from atop their uparmored Humvees.

Ermey also made trips to Kabul, Kandahar, and some of the remote forward operating bases to spend time with the Soldiers currently deployed, as well as sailors, airmen and Marines operating in country.

"When talking to Ermey, you will find that his personality is the same on and off camera," said Robert Lihani, "Mail Call" director and executive producer.

This was evident as he jokingly made Soldiers do push ups and excitedly handled heavy equipment.

Lihani first thought of Ermey when the idea for the show came up because of his performance as a drill instructor in the motion picture "Full Metal Jacket."

Ermey not only motivates the military by supporting them, he was at one time one of them.

"I joined the Marines when I was 17, and haven't been apart from them since," said Ermey. "When I joined the military I was in a lot of trouble with the law. The Marines took me in and saved my life."

"Even though I retired after 11 years of service in the Marine Corps, I am still compelled to be with the troops 44 years later. I may be too old to fight with the

troops," said Ermey, "but I will never be too old to motivate them."

Ermey spent a month in Iraq last year and now a week this year here.

"Of all the troops I have had the honor to meet, the National Guard and the Reserve units stand out in my mind.

"They are required to leave their full-time job, family and everyday life because

the military calls upon them.

"I consider them the most patriotic of all. I have never heard one of them complain about being deployed for long periods of time, even those with babies at home whom they have never seen," said Ermey. "This is what everyone signs up for, but not all of them full-time."

With 52 shows in the can, the crew of



Top: R. Lee Ermey fires the M249 SAW under the supervision of the 805th Military Police Co. during patrols. Bottom: R. Lee Ermey shares a laugh with his interviewee and crew during an Afghanistan-focused episode of 'Mail Call.'



"Mail Call" sees no end in sight.

"Just watching him on the show motivates the troops, but when he shows up the motivation goes through the roof," said Lihani.

But as Gunny says, "You can never have too much motivation."

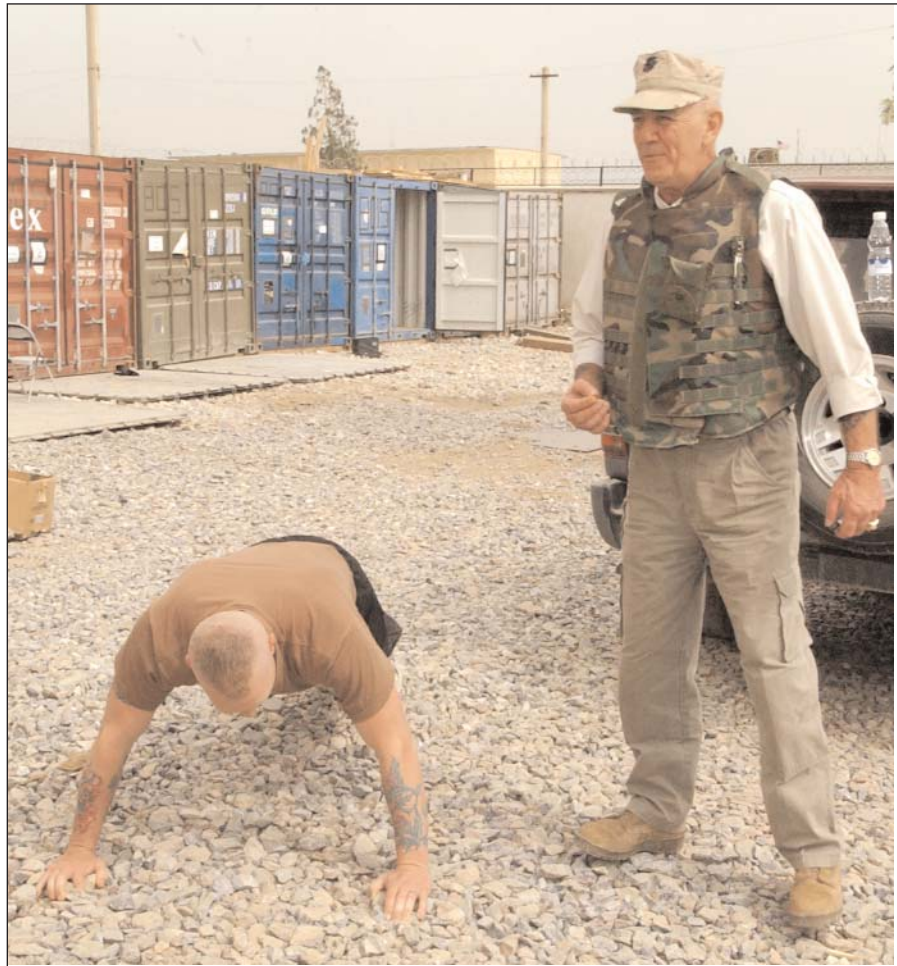
"And as long as we are able to keep up the pace and fresh ideas, the show will never die," he said. "If the show were to end it would be a sad day because we would not be able to tell the military story anymore."

Ermey enjoys not only being around the military, but taking part in what they are doing.

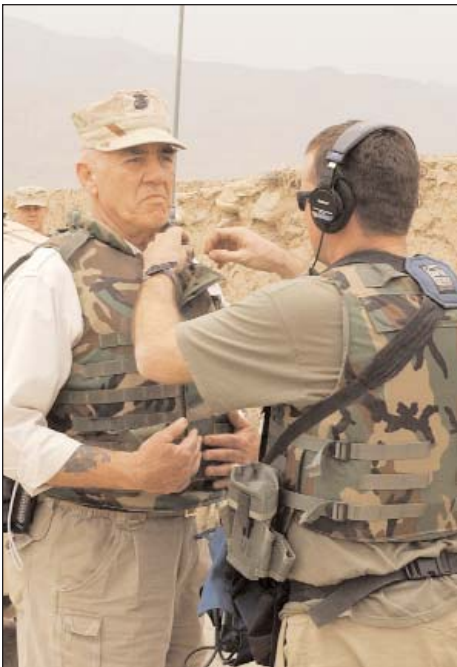
"Each show is a new adventure. I have a lot of fun at every shoot. I get to blow stuff up, fire weapons without having to clean them and even drive the tanks every once in a while. Being around the troops keeps me young and makes me happy."

Even though Ermey has grown up since he was in the Marines, he still has the heart and spirit of a child.

"I am 60 years old and have the energy of an 18-year-old. I am married and have four grown children. I attend at least eight, if not more, Marine Corps Birthday Balls each November, and spend each December traveling with the Marines' Toys for Tots program," he said. "I love being able to go out and see the troops when they are at home or deployed. I go where the military goes, that's where I feel at home."



Top: Ermey "drops" Sgt. Brian Every, 450th MP Co., before going on patrols with the 805th MP Co. Bottom: Ermey loads the MK19 in preparation to fire during the filming of a segment of "Mail Call." Ermey was riding along with the 805th MP Co. during routine patrols near Bagram.



Ermey prepares for an on-camera segment for Mail Call during patrols near Bagram with 805th MP Co. Ermey is spending one week in Afghanistan with the deployed troops here.



Humanitarian aid mission brings U.S. community to Afghanistan

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Johnny A. Thompson
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – On paper, the Combined Joint Task Force-180's mission is to kill, capture and deny sanctuary to al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan. However, translate that statement into real-world terms and it means helping a nation and its people rebuild and become self sufficient.

Lending their support to the Afghanistan reconstruction movement, the 1st Battalion, 109th Aviation Regiment, a National Guard unit from Boone, Iowa, conducted a humanitarian aid mission here Mar. 25.

As part of the Adopt-a-Village and Adopt-a-School programs sponsored by the Parwan Provincial Reconstruction Team, the 1-109th Avn. Rgt. delivered more than 45 boxes of school supplies, candy, soccer balls, hygiene items, hats and book bags to the Qalaya Beland High School in Parwan Province.

"When we got here in August and saw the (living) conditions, I knew I wanted to do something to help," said Maj. Rick Ely, 1-109th Avn. Rgt. executive officer "I visited civil affairs and found out that an Adopt-a-School program was available, so I called my wife and children, told them, and they wanted to join the program."

Ely said his children started the 1-109th Avn. Rgt. Adopt-a-School drive at Fellows Elementary School in Ames, Iowa in September. But the drive quickly spread and before long aid was coming in from other Soldiers' families and surrounding communities.

"Our purpose (in the Adopt-a-School program) started out as being a way of getting our families back home involved in our deployment," said Capt. Brian Schmidt, 1-109th Avn. Rgt., HHC commander, "but instead it turned into a community event. The community didn't just want to support us. They wanted to join the Army in their own way, and (the program) was their way of joining and fighting the war on terrorism."



Above, below: Students at the Qalaya Beland High School patiently wait to open their individually wrapped care packages as Soldiers from the 1-109th Avn Rgt. hand out humanitarian aid as part of the Adopt-a-School program. The 1-109th Avn. Rgt. handed out more than 300 individual care packages.



Reiterating Schmidt's words, Spc. Jonathan Vink, of HHD, 1-109th Avn. Rgt. said, "Our community is very close and they are tied into us, so while (the amount of aid we've received) is amazing, it isn't surprising to me. It feels good to know that even when we're not there, we are not forgotten."

During the aid mission, the 1-109th gave more than 300 students individually wrapped care packages. Along with the aid, members of the CJTF-180 Psychological Operations team handed out the Peace Newspaper to teachers and school administrators.

"It was exciting to see the children smiling and laughing as they opened the care packages," said Ely. "I missed Christmas with my two children. So to see them enjoying themselves really made me feel good."

Agreeing with Ely, Schmidt said, "It was great to hear the laughter of children. To see the children enjoying the gifts made me appreciate my country and my community a lot more. My hope is that (the Adopt-a-School program) shows the kids that it's people that are in the U.S. that care. And we want the same things for them that we want for our kids – a country where they can feel safe and get a good education."

Though the 1-109th Avn. Rgt. official mission may be to help CJTF-180 rid Afghanistan of terrorist militants, their families and their community back home are dedicated to helping them remember that they're here for a cause much greater – helping a nation rebuild.



Maj. Rick Ely, 1-109th Avn. Rgt., hands out humanitarian aid to students at the Qalaya Beland High School. The 1-109 Avn. Rgt. delivered 45 boxes of supplies to the school as part of the Adopt-a-School program.

Afghan medical facilities steadily improve

Spc. Douglas DeMaio
Office of Military Cooperation

KABUL, Afghanistan – To build and sustain an army, two basic resources are needed – Soldiers and money. Health care professionals fit into the equation of building and sustaining a force by ensuring recruits are physically able to serve and are able-bodied to fight and defend.

Throughout history, it is well known that an army that suffers severe casualties from diseases, infections and viruses will no doubt lose men and suffer defeat on the battlefield.

Which means typhus, plague, cholera, typhoid and dysentery have decided more campaigns than the great generals of history.

As modern medicine and immunizations significantly decrease wartime deaths, the ability to build and sustain an army increase.

The Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan and the Afghan Ministry of Defense are effectively implementing medical prevention methods for a fledgling Afghan National Army, which is fighting the worldwide war on terrorism on their native soil.

“Capacity building is the key element to establishing the overall ANA medical structure,” said Capt. Craig Bukowski, Deputy Medical Plans Officer for the ANA Plans and Design Team, OMC -A.



Dr. Gmal, a physician for the Afghan ministry of Defense, stands beside the latest addition to his hospital, a medical bed.

“The structure, equipment, training and support OMC-A, PDT is developing is based on that foundation. The assets we are giving them consist only of what they are capable of understanding and financing long after we are gone.”

Medical supplies, equipment and training are making a difference in Afghanistan's defense sector.

To date the Coalition has helped to establish and outfit three ANA clinics. Central Corps, KMTC and Kabul Military High School clinic are fully operational and supporting the medical needs of ANA troops. Pol-e-charki's clinic is due to become fully operational in the next few weeks.

Soldiers joining the ANA are receiving the best medical treatment Afghanistan has to offer, Bukowski said. The Poly-Clinic is the National Hospital's Outpatient Clinic.

It is fully operational and includes the country's only CT scan. The CT scan is a cooperative private contract initiative between MoD, the U.S. Army and Wahaj Co. to provide high tech, low cost care for the civilian population and ANA and MoD government officials.

The medical team for the ANA PDT — consisting of Bukowski, medical NCO Sgt. 1st Class Edward Swisher and OMC-A Chief Medical Plans Officer Lt. Col. Gregory Vrentas — has designed an entire medical structure, including all personnel, equipment and budgets, for the ANA. The medical structure consists of four 100-bed regional hospitals, the Armed Forces Academy of Medical Science, which consists of the 400-bed National Military Hospital, five Central Corps clinics and The Office of the Surgeon General and the Military Medical Training Facility.

“The coalition has done many great things for us, and we hope over the next



Medical NCO Sgt. 1st Class Edward Swisher coordinates equipment move-in with ANA soldiers.

Photos by Staff Sgt. Kelly McCargo

few years that we will become more self sufficient,” said Dr. Gmal, a physician for the Afghan Ministry of Defense.

Ongoing is the re-outfitting of the 400-bed National Military Hospital.

“We will replace the 400-bed hospital with all new equipment, including renovating the entire hospital and its supporting systems — i.e. laundry, kitchen, morgue, etc,” Bukowski said. “Renovations on the main building will start within the next 45 days — hopefully. We have already made emergency repairs to the steam and sewer plants, electric substations and water system.”

Laboratory equipment will help doctors diagnose and prevent the cause of symptoms recruits and soldiers may experience during their time in service with the ANA, said Gmal.

But medical facilities and equipment are not the only improvements ANA soldiers and government officials are seeing. All soldiers receive basic first aid training, and more than 150 ANA soldiers have received formal training and are combat medics.

The advanced individual training for combat medics is improving the quality of education the soldiers are receiving to save lives and attend to the medical needs of soldiers or civilians if need be.

“I grew up in a war situation and wasn't afforded opportunities to receive a very good education,” said Gmal. “As I see new professionals in my field, I can see they will have a greater opportunity to receive a better education and make a difference for all Afghans through better medical training.”

JTAC calls for CAS, minimizes casualties

Master Sgt. Jeff Szczechowski
455th Expeditionary Operations

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan – “Dad, you’re still at work?”

When Staff Sgt. Jason Cry gets a chance to talk over the phone with his 5-year-old son, he explains his long absence from home in a way to help him understand why Dad wasn’t there for Christmas. Or why he can’t be there at night to read him a bedtime story, kiss him on the head and tuck him under the covers before he goes to sleep.

He tells his son that the Air Force needs him to do some important work, so he can’t be home with him right now. But when his work is through ... well, that’s going to be a nice reunion.

Cry’s efforts here have clearly played a vital role in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He’s an Air Force joint tactical air controller with the 682nd Air Support Operations Squadron, deployed to Combined Joint Task Force-180 at Bagram Air Base. During a recent ground confrontation, he demonstrated the importance of all JTACs to the war on terrorism in a powerful way.

In the early morning hours of March 18, in a village called Miam Do, Coalition and Afghan National Army Soldiers came under the fire of anti-coalition militia shooting from inside a compound there. Cry was the joint tactical air controller assigned to the Army ground forces going after the bad guys, and for the next 34 hours, he would be responsible for coordinating close air support for the embattled Coalition forces.

“We’re the link between the Army and the Air Force when the need arises for close air support,” Cry said. “Without us, there is no close air support, only firefights.”

While at Miam Do, Cry was working directly under the U.S. Army battalion commander. When the situation became deadly around 6:30 a.m. and the commander determined that CAS was needed, he called on his JTAC to swing into action. Once again, one of the most anonymous career fields in the Air Force, at least to other Air Force members, was about to demonstrate just how critical its airmen are during the heat of battle.

When Cry made his first radio request back to the Air Support Operations Center at Bagram Air Base, where other JTACs in the Joint Operations Center field incoming communications, he already had an awesome amount of responsibility settling upon his young shoulders.

He said he had to decide quickly what actions to take to properly control the ensuing air operations, including how best to maximize the use of the air frames sent in to provide CAS, what type of weapons to use and where to direct the hits.

Anticipating what type of aircraft might be employed, and thinking ahead about how best to use each one, is part of the entire thought process, he said.

He also needed to analyze how close any “friendlies” were in

relation to the positions to be targeted. He would have an incredible amount of firepower – literally at his call – above the field, and a miscalculation when directing a strike could lead to the one mistake, the one word, every JTAC has stuck in the back of his mind – fratricide.

Lives are dependent on how the JTAC performs, said Cry, a job that might not appeal to many people.

“It’s not for everyone,” said Cry. “You have a lot of lives depending on you – ones that you can take out and ones that you have to protect.”

It’s one thing to calculate all the variables when bringing in a two-ship A-10 formation for CAS, as he did earlier in the fight when he called on a pair of 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron fighter pilots to make a first strike on the enemy compound. But what was really critical were the battle-field assessments racing through his mind knowing that he had four A-10 Thunderbolt II’s and four AH-64 Apaches at his dispatch, plus an AC-130 Gunship and its lethal 105mm cannon. On top of that, a B-1B Lancer crew radioed to announce that it was in the area and ready to render its services if needed.

“Everything happens fast when you’re out there. There’s not much time to think, so your mind is always racing,” said Cry. “And then a bomber shows up—that was a surprise. You’re not sure right away what to do with a bomber.”

But he made exceptionally good use of the aircraft that were there to support the ground troops, as the

second stage of the battle would show.

First, his battalion commander requested support from the AC-130 Gunship, and Cry brought it in. After making sure that no Coalition forces were in the line-of-fire, he had it let loose with its 105mm cannon, 26 potent rounds in all.

Next, the B-1B Lancer moved in, dropping three, 2,000-pound JDAMs right on target. But when enemy gunfire persisted, Cry turned again to the 354th EFS, leaving it to two A-10 Warthog fighter pilots to deliver the decisive blows.

In a battle that ultimately cost the lives of two U.S. Soldiers and one ANA soldier, Coalition forces, with Cry’s indispensable tactical ground radio control being one of the key elements, killed five anti-coalition militia. According to a press release from Combined Forces Command in Kabul, Coalition forces also uncovered Taliban propaganda, approximately one ton of ammunition, and weapons that included rockets, mines, machine guns, and rocket propelled grenade launchers, inside the enemy compound.

With “bombs on target,” Cry listed as the most rewarding part of his job, and the battle over, this Air Force joint tactical air controller had demonstrated, once again, how vital the 682nd Air Support Operations Center, and its JTACS, is to the worldwide war on terrorism here in Afghanistan.

More important to a 5-year-old boy back in the States, though, is that his dad is almost done with his four-month working day. Cry left Afghanistan, homeward bound, the first week of April.



Air Force Staff Sgt. Jason Cry stands by an A-10 Thunderbolt, the same model aircraft he called in for close air support while on a mission with Army ground troops.

All clear!

A&O Soldiers sweep minefields, recycle land

Story and photos by
Sgt. Stephanie Hall
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan – Armed with heavy-duty vehicles and nerves of armored steel, the Soldiers of the Assault and Obstacle Platoon of Company B, 41st Engineer Battalion, roll out every morning to face one of Bagram Air Base's most prominent enemies – mines.

The Soldiers jump into armored vehicles and “face one of the most dangerous jobs here,” said Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Murphy, A&O platoon sergeant.

The job is dangerous because these Soldiers are most times the first to enter known minefields around Bagram Air Base with the sole purpose of detonating mines.

“It's a job where you have to have faith in your abilities,” said Murphy.

To lessen the possibility of a disastrous situation, the Soldiers make use of innovative techniques and operate the latest equipment.

The Hydrema and the Aardvark, two pieces of the platoon's de-mining equip-



Two armored bucket loaders work together to level a de-mined area for future Bagram operations. The vehicles are able to withstand the impact of an anti-personnel mine.

ment, each use flailing chains that beat the ground with force measured in tons to detonate mines that may be hidden under the surface.

After the Hydrema and Aardvark plow through the minefields, another de-mining entity - separate from the platoon - manually double-checks the area using mine dogs and the skills of military and civilian personnel.

Once the area has been deemed cleared, Soldiers with the A&O Platoon then use armored bucket loaders and armored bulldozers to transform the land to the specific needs of Combined Joint Task Force-180, said Murphy.

The Hydrema and the Aardvark can withstand anti-personnel and anti-tank mines while the bucket loader and bulldozer can withstand anti-personnel mines.

Two of these vehicles have been put to the test and proved themselves worthy of withstanding anti-tank mines.

“We’ve actually had two pieces of equipment (dis-

abled) – not permanently, but they have gone down for a month or more – from hitting anti-tank mines,” said Murphy.

During one face off with an AT mine, the mine blew pieces of a bulldozer apart, said Murphy.

“The operator popped a few blood vessels in his eyes and had a mild concussion, but he’s back on the equipment operating,” he said.

The second time a vehicle and its operator were confronted with an AT mine, it “pretty much just wrecked the Hydrema, but the operator was okay,” he said.

These instances are rare, but possible, said Murphy.

“I have to get up every morning and tell my guys, ‘Hey, go in that minefield and clear that minefield,’ ” said Murphy. “Getting up in the morning, getting into a vehicle and driving into a minefield is not a natural thing, but the guys do it willingly.”

The danger is real, and these Soldiers are reminded of that everyday, he said.

“My junior leaders are great because they don’t allow their men to get complacent, they force them to stay vigilant. They force them to stay on track,” he said.

Despite the risk involved, these Soldiers stay self-motivated.

“They constantly get fired up,” said Murphy.

“There’s no replacement for them. I can’t say enough about the Soldiers because they’re the guys that really make it happen.”



Spc. James A. Todd, A&O Plt., 41st Eng. Bn., attempts to uncoil a long strip of steel that wrapped around the flailing device of the Aardvark.



Respect

Treat people as they should be treated.